On a Wing and a Prayer

Reversing the Trend in BCT ISR and Shaping Operations

by Captain David A. Meyer

It's line of departure (LD) -2 hours somewhere in the central corridor. The brigade commander enters the tactical operations center (TOC) for a quick intelligence dump before he moves out to the tactical command post (TAC), where the operations sergeant major greets him with a thunderous "AT EASE!" Everyone stands, except the battle captain and the S2. One look and the commander realizes it was a long night for the Brigade Combat Team (BCT). A quick scan of the main operations areas reveals that the S2 has the priority intelligence requirements (PIR) from mission analysis displayed outside of his track; the main battle map has operations graphics and a situation template (SITEMP) posted; and the proposed locations of all the BCT's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets from Annex L of the operation order (OPORD) are written on a note pad near the map. The battle captain, one of a number of capable officers from the S3 shop who rotate through the graveyard shift, laments, "Sir, I just don't get it, we've had reports coming in all night, but nothing we can put together into anything useful." "Yes, Sir." adds the S2, "I have been pouring over these reports for hours, but they just don't seem to add up." The commander shakes his head, "So I guess none of my PIR have been answered?" His only answer is silence. "OK fellas, I guess we'll have to get them next fight."

ISR operations are "the fight before the fight." The units tasked to execute them operate with limited planning time and incomplete guidance. They execute in the dark, with little support and often only the sounds of their own voices for comfort. So, what's new? More and more, ISR assets are not just scouts in the night. Increasingly, they are the tools that BCT commanders use to shape their battlefields. With the reduction in size of the maneuver battalion, the addition of dedicated ISR assets at the brigade level, and the proliferation of access to higher levels of intelligence, the relationship of the brigade to the battalions has changed. The main focus of the brigade plan can now shift from simply forming and synchronizing the schemes of maneuver and fires to directly influencing the success of the operation through shaping operations. The recognition of this new relationship is critical to the success of the brigade ISR plan.

U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-90.3, *The Mounted Brigade Combat Team*, establishes the new paradigm: "Unlike [reconnaissance and surveillance] R&S missions, ISR operations are fully developed plans that begin during mission analysis. ISR operations are a commander's function supported by the entire staff and subordinate units. ISR develops, synchronizes, and integrates intelligence from a multitude of collection sources. ISR operations are multifaceted and their integration eliminates unit and functional

'stovepipes' for planning, reporting, and processing information, and for producing intelligence."[1] The practicalities of ISR operations are another matter entirely. The detail in planning and execution rigor inherently present in maneuver operations plans is seldom present in ISR plans, and no single person or agency is solely responsible for success or failure of those plans. These factors all cause the ISR plan and its execution to be unfocused and those executing it to be poorly resourced and supported. From planning through execution, the problems that regularly plague ISR operations can be broken into 10 basic categories:

I'll pin this rose on you — the dedicated ISR planner. The responsibility of the brigade to fully resource the shaping operation puts a whole new spin on the process of ISR planning. Just as the brigade operation will succeed or fail on the strength of the ISR plan, the brigade staff primaries, particularly the S3, must take a renewed interest in the accuracy and completeness of Annex L. While the primaries may not author the final documents, they must have a large hand in the initial echelonment of assets and deliver clear guidance to the ISR planning staff regarding the task and purpose for the brigade ISR assets.

The brigade S3 has multiple responsibilities and is under a constrained timeline, so he will likely not see the plan through to completion and the brigade must designate a permanent, full time ISR planner. The ISR planner, probably a captain from the S3 section, will receive guidance for ISR operations from the BCT commander and S3 following the mission analysis brief. The ISR planner leads the planning effort in constructing and disseminating Annex L. Whoever the BCT commander chooses as his ISR planner must understand the capabilities and limitations of the brigade's total ISR assets. The brigade ISR planning team must include a representative from each major battlefield operating system (BOS), especially the military intelligence company analysis and control team (ACT) and BCT fire support element, and should use the PIR approved following mission analysis as the focal point for all their efforts. During this process, the direct support military intelligence company commander, serving as the BCT electronic warfare and signal intelligence asset manager, must ensure his systems, which are often neglected due to a poor understanding of their capabilities, are fully integrated into the ISR plan. ISR planning will almost always be a time-constrained process, so brigade must clearly establish the products and information owed to the ISR planner and the suspense date. The ISR planner must remember, however, that during this time of great activity, the brigade is focused on developing the plan for the main maneuver battle and the attentions of BOS representatives, such as the air defense artillery battery or company, may be split.

The ISR planner must aggressively pursue required details because brigade ISR assets will have little time to clarify his instructions prior to execution. In this last regard, the ACT is habitually underused. The ACT is the brigade's "window to the world" to higher-level intelligence. The ACT chief can provide the ISR planner with a current intelligence picture, a snapshot starting point, which will allow the planner to construct a more focused plan based on current enemy information. The ISR planner leads the process through the ISR rehearsal when he hands off the plan to the ISR executor.

Can you repeat the question — PIR specificity. PIR is "an intelligence requirement associated with a decision that will affect the overall success of the command's mission. PIR is prioritized and may change in priority over the course of the operation's conduct. Only the commander designates PIR."[2]

PIR generally focus on information required to prevent surprise, support planning, support decisions during execution of a friendly course of action (COA), and engage high payoff targets in support of a COA. They are products of the decisionmaking and targeting processes. The decisionmaking process leads to selecting friendly COA. The selected COA includes a list of intelligence requirements (IR) some of which the commander will designate as PIR. The S2 will weigh the PIR to organize the collection effort. The S2 must use the ISR plan and tell commanders what they need to know in time for them to react.

PIR should ask only one question. They should be specific, answerable, and actionable. PIR must provide what (intelligence required), why (dependent decision), when (latest time information of value), and how (format, method of delivery). Overly general PIR dilute the ISR focus and create an unwinnable situation for the S2. The S2 must sort through the information flow and create tools to assist the staff to filter useful, routine, and unusable information. Vague PIR will not produce timely information for the brigade. PIR should directly relate to a maneuver decision. Finally, because PIR are approved for use and are disseminated earlier than any other major BOS product, the S2 must ensure that if PIR change or are modified, or if new PIR are created, that the ISR plan addresses the new PIR. The S2 and S3 must constantly

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monitor the progress of the ISR effort so that they will know when to update PIR or to modify the ISR plan. The PIR, and with it the ISR plan, must stay relevant to the maneuver plan as it develops, or neither will be able to support the BCT commander at the point of decision.

Most Scouts can't even spell Huachuca (Wa-chu-ka) — specific information requirements (SIR) and specific orders and requests (SOR) specificity. "In many cases, the IR will have to be broken down into specific IR sets that ask very specific questions about indicators. These indicators are tasked to collectors, and taken together, they answer the larger question. Once an asset is chosen to collect information for an IR, planners will build good SOR to give focus to the assets on what to do with the information once they retrieve it. The SOR is a directive statement that tailors the reporting criteria to the collection capabilities of the tasked asset."[3]

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Generally speaking, soldiers who do the hard work of information gathering are the best the unit has to offer. They spend extended hours in hazardous situations, often with little or no support or guidance. They are not, however, very well versed in details of how an IR is developed and how they end up with it. The average military education level of those executing the plan is officer basic course or basic noncommissioned officers course and this must be taken into account. The brigade staff must be disciplined to ask specific, realistic, and most of all, answerable questions of its collectors. In the same way that vague PIR are useless to the BCT commander, SIR without enough detail, and SOR without times and methods, are of no use to their consumer. ISR planning staffs must assist subordinate leaders of the BCT's ISR assets by ensuring the intelligence language of the PIR, SIR, and SOR are specific, executable, and can be translated into the operations language spoken by those tasked with the mission. To do less would violate the planning staff's basic principle to support the warfighter's needs.

You want me to look where — named areas of interest (NAI) specificity and relation to enemy decisions. "Mission analysis results in the creation of an event template with timed phase lines tied to NAI and target areas of interest (TAI) that are linked to decision points (DP) for the commander. The NAI, TAI, and DP are expressed on the decision support template (DST) and link the things the commander needs to know with the geographical location the information may be found, and the time the information is likely to be available (based on the event template)."[4]

Intelligence preparation of the battlefield must identify the enemy's decisive actions. These decisive actions must then be prioritized and focused for the brigade's ISR assets. The ISR plan must not simply track the enemy into sector. Rather, it is the method by which multiple enemy courses of action are confirmed or denied, and through feedback of ISR information into the maneuver plan the brigade commander makes decisions. To further complicate things, units will often only produce an enemy SITEMP, which only displays one possibility rather than several possibilities with enemy maneuver tied to time and space. The ISR plan then becomes the default mechanism to track the enemy's movement, and units are instantly in the reactive mode and rely heavily on higher intelligence feeds. The event template is the most important product needed for ISR planning. With the event template, the ISR plan can be used properly to assist the brigade in being proactive and ensuring the brigade remains focused on the enemy decision points as they relate to friendly and enemy maneuver decisions. This focus can then be reflected in the NAI assigned to ISR units and forms the basis for the ISR executor's actions.

What's your vector Victor — ISR battlespace deconfliction and triggers. **"**Recon handoff (RHO) is an operation between two units that transfers information and responsibility for reconnaissance and surveillance of an assigned area or enemy contact from one unit to another. The purpose for RHO is maintaining contact with the enemy or observation of a specific area, and ensuring that recon units are not in each other's direct-fire range. RHO is normally associated with a designated area or recon handoff line (RHOL) (phase line); it may be of a sector or zone, NAI, TAI, and/or threat contact. RHO can be visual, electronic, digital, or analog."[5]

The brigade security zone is an increasingly crowded place. The creation of the brigade recon troop and the continued proliferation of information from division, and higher-level, observation assets, such as unmanned aerial vehicles and JSTARS, down to brigade level has created a whole new requirement for deconfliction of the ISR battlespace. To accomplish this, the brigade must organize ISR assets in both space and time. RHOLs must be established and treated as restrictive boundaries. Boundaries and other graphic control measures must be created and enforced to guarantee the proper echelonment of forces to accomplish the mission. The brigade must echelon its assets to either provide observation of the enemy from acquisition to destruction, or to pass and receive targets indirectly from adjacent units as contact is lost. The input of the BCT fire support officer (FSO) is particularly critical to the proper echelonment of observers. The FSO must ensure that in the arrangement of assets the proper linkage exists between the scout observing the tactical trigger and the asset, brigade or task force, tasked to observe the technical trigger for a target or group. Without this clearly defined and understood link, the BCT commander has little hope of effectively using the combined effects of fires to shape the enemy.

It is inconceivable to imagine a circumstance where two maneuver companies would try to occupy the same key terrain to perform different missions. The same process must be applied to the ISR plan. Too often, multiple ISR assets occupy the same piece of "good" terrain, which makes the terrain worthless to all. Effective terrain and battlespace management is imperative to the success of the ISR fight. Redundancy is important, but overcrowding will ultimately hinder, rather than help, the ISR efforts.

Who's your daddy — ISR command and support relationships. Even with well-organized battlespace, the brigade

must carefully and completely define the command and support relationship between the units in, and adjacent to, the brigade security zone. The brigade recon troop (BRT) certainly has the capability to command and control most of the brigade's ISR effort, however, based on its austere support architecture, the BRT has very limited support ability. Additionally, the BRT is extremely limited in its capability to resupply special types of munitions such as situational obstacles or Stinger missiles. Similarly, other assets, such as a signal interceptors or jammers, may operate in the security zone but have no bearing on the BRT and report directly to the brigade. This lack of clarity in the specifics of the command and support relationships in the crowded and often widely focused security zone is a recipe for fratricide, failures of coordination and communication, and ultimately the failure to properly track the enemy through multiple stovepiped organizations. The ISR plans staff can complicate these challenges by having a poor understanding of the implications of these various relationships. Careful adherence to the command and support relationship charts from FM 101-5, Tables 2-1 and 2-2, is the key to ensuring the task organization is well understood, realistic, and executable.

My kingdom for a horse — logistics support to ISR operations. While all the ISR assets in the brigade have unique qualities and responsibilities, they all share a common challenge — logistics support to the brigade security zone. ISR assets are universally bereft of organic logistics support. As a result, they are entirely dependent on the brigade to plan and coordinate their support in advance. The brigade staff must account for the full range of class-of-supply support, maintenance management and recovery, and medical treatment and evacuation in the ISR plan. In most cases, subordinate units can be tasked with part or all of this process, but these tasks must be clearly assigned, understood, and rehearsed prior to execution. The battle rhythm of execution of ISR operations is most desynchronized with the timeline of the logistics community. In general, brigade support units are prepared to execute operations at the LD time of the main maneuver battle. Unfortunately, at this point, ISR operations have usually been in progress for some 30 hours. The ISR plans staff must ensure the logistics assets of the brigade are well prepared to support not only in space, but also in time.

Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse — the BCT ISR rehearsal. To fully synchronize the efforts of all of the units involved in ISR execution, the brigade must conduct an ISR rehearsal. The ISR rehearsal is led by the ISR executor and should be attended by brigade key leaders and a knowledgeable representative from every unit in the brigade. This representative should come prepared to discuss the execution of their unit's ISR plan in relation to each PIR, including the SIR and SOR of each NAI. Additionally, each unit must describe, in detail, its scheme of maneuver, unit location, handoff procedures, fire support responsibilities, logistics and casualty evacuation plans, and current combat power.

The final product is a copy of consolidated ISR graphics and PIR/SIR distributed to all ISR assets, and the brigade ISR executor must be prepared to supervise execution. The brigade S2 should be at this rehearsal to ensure that each unit's ISR plan is in synch with what he needs to know. He should ensure that the assets and units are set up to answer the PIR and SIR. He will be the one monitoring, answering, and recommending new PIR to the commander. He must ensure that the ISR assets are positioned, or have plans to reposition, in the event the PIR and SIR change.

I know the answer, but no one seems to care — information integration into operations. "As the operation progresses…it is very likely that the staff's assumptions about the threat COAs will not prove entirely correct. This may result in changes to the intelligence requirements or adjustments to the collection timeline."[6]

Ultimately, the point of ISR is to answer questions for the commander; these answers then form the basis for decisions. If the information developed by the brigade's ISR assets is not analyzed and integrated into the decisions of the brigade, then manpower has been wasted. While this seems intuitive, many great spot reports and good information have been lost as just another entry on the DA Form 1594. An examination of the battle rhythm and operations timelines of the brigade as they prepare for the main maneuver battle, sheds further light on the problem. In the hours leading up to LD, brigade leaders are faced with a myriad of conflicting demands from battlefield circulation to conducting a number of different rehearsals.

While brigade is clearly hard pressed to ensure full integration of intelligence developed from reports of ISR assets, to do any less needlessly risks the success of the main maneuver battle. The S2 should monitor the ISR plan and evaluate how well the assets are reporting. If the assets are not reporting quickly, accurately, or are reporting wrong information, he needs to make corrections. He must train the TOC to reject incomplete information

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and to establish a good format and train. The S2 must demand that the assets and TOC personnel abide by very stringent rules. The S2 and ISR executor must be aggressive and remember that they are responsible for answering the commander's questions.

Who's steering this ship — the dedicated ISR executor. "As with all operations, the collection plan will rarely survive contact with the enemy and will require adjustment during execution."[7]

ISR operations occur out of sync with the main battle rhythm of the brigade. As a result, the brigade command and control node tasked with supervising ISR execution is usually a well meaning, but random, battle captain on shift at the TOC. The problem with this method is that the officer tasked with supervising this execution has no prior knowledge of the plan, no sense of the BCT commander's or S2's priorities and, most importantly, no authority to make course corrections, if actions are progressing outside of these intents. These conditions create a condition that prevents the full integration of information received, and limits the flexibility of the ISR system to answer questions on an evolving enemy situation. The brigade must designate one officer, probably a captain from the S2 section, as the ISR executor. This officer, who is not a member of the ISR planning team, takes charge of the ISR effort at the ISR rehearsal and supervises it until the LD of the main maneuver battle. His control of the ISR operation will also allow the S2 and staff to keep track of asset status and location. The ISR executor must fully integrate with the direct support military intelligence company commander to ensure the full use of electronic warfare and signal intelligence assets, and to understand when the brigade priority shifts between the two. The ISR executor must always know which of the assets are still mission capable and which are inoperative. He must be empowered to make changes to the plan according to the BCT commander's intent and serve as the link between the ISR plan and the maneuver decisions the information drives.

The brigade that fails to thoroughly plan its ISR operations cannot reasonably expect to be successful in its main maneuver battle. The BCT battlestaff must be disciplined to fully craft, synchronize, and supervise a complete and detailed ISR plan, despite their lack of time and dedicated resources. In his book, *Achtung – Panzer*, Major General Heinz Guderian succinctly sums this up, "The purpose of reconnaissance is to provide the commander with an accurate assessment of what the enemy is doing; in effect information of this kind furnishes the basis for command decisions"[8]

Several days later … it's LD -2 hours somewhere in the central corridor. The brigade commander enters the TOC for a quick intelligence dump, and is again greeted by a thunderous "AT EASE!" from the operations sergeant major. Everyone comes to their feet; looks of confidence and pride replace those of a few days ago. This time, the BCT commander sees that the S2 still has the PIR from mission analysis displayed outside of his track, but now they are written on and revised with old ones removed and new ones added. The main battle map has operations graphics, an NAI overlay, and an event template posted with the current locations of all the BCT's ISR assets represented by pushpins. The ISR executor is standing by the map, ready to brief all the observers on locations and coverage, if the commander so requires. "Sir, we have answered PIR 1 and 2," the S2 opens, "we've had reports coming in all night, and should be able to answer PIR 3 and 4 at, or right after, LD." "Yes, Sir," adds the ISR executor, "I had to reseed some losses to the BRT last night from one of the task forces to ensure coverage on your critical NAI, but we are okay now." The commander smiles, "Okay fellas, anything else I need to know before I go forward?" His answer again is silence, but a very different kind of silence than before. "Good work everyone," the BCT commander says as he leaves for the TAC, and speaking silently to his impending enemy, he exclaims, "Gotcha!"

Notes

[1]U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-90.3, *The Mounted Brigade Combat Team,* Headquarters, Department of the Army, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington DC, 1 November 2001, 4-1.

[2]FM 34-130, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield,* HQ, DA, GPO, Washington DC, 8 July 1994.

[3]FM 3-90.3, 4-5.

[4]Ibid., Chapter 4.

[5]Ibid., 4-7.

[6]Ibid., 4-8.

[7]Ibid., Chapter 4.

[8]Major-General Heinz Guderian, *Achtung-Panzer!*, Arms and Armour Press, London, 1995, 163.

CPT David Meyer is the senior brigade recon troop trainer at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA. He received a B.S. from Frostburg State University, Maryland. His military education includes the Armor Officer Basic Course and the Armor Officer Advanced Course. He has served in various command and staff positions, to include commander, B Company, 2d Battalion, 69th Armor, 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (ID), Fort Benning, GA; commander, D Troop, 10th Cavalry (Brigade Recon Troop), 3d Brigade, 3d ID, Fort Benning; brigade plans officer, 3d Brigade, 3d ID, Fort Benning; XO, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX; and tank platoon leader and S3 Air, 1st Squadron, 12th Cavalry, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood.